



Good personal hygiene reduces the likelihood of food contamination

Why is personal hygiene important?

Food handlers have a moral and legal responsibility to keep high standards of personal cleanliness (including hand washing in particular) to ensure that they do not contaminate food. People buying food trust you to protect them from food-borne illness.

Your employer has a responsibility, under the Food Hygiene Regulations 1974, to exclude you from work if it is likely that you may transmit disease-causing organisms onto food. Does your workplace have a sickness policy?

One way to protect food from contamination is to wash your hands regularly during the day.

Wash your hands

- BEFORE** starting work
handling food
wearing gloves
- AFTER** handling food or equipment
using the toilet
handling raw meat/poultry
using a handkerchief
sneezing
smoking
handling money
lunch and tea breaks
touching your hair, mouth or nose
- WHEN** they are dirty

The most important piece of equipment on your premises is the hand basin. The way you use and maintain the basin is a critical control method in preventing food-borne illness.

Make sure the hand basin is kept clean and made available at all times. Soap, nailbrush and hand drying facilities must be available.

If you work with food, you should wash your hands and uncovered parts of your arms with soap, a nailbrush and warm water. Your hands must be thoroughly washed for at least 20 seconds, and then rinsed with clean warm water. Hands should be dried on a clean disposable towel or with a hot air dryer. Your apron is not a clean towel.

Remember: many food poisoning outbreaks have been traced back to contamination from food handlers not washing their hands correctly, such as after using the toilet. Correct and regular hand washing will reduce the risk of food-borne illness to customers.

Tips for avoiding food contamination

Do not sneeze or cough near any food or dishes.

Let your supervisor know if you are sick with symptoms such as vomiting or diarrhoea. It is better that you are not at work until you have been cleared of any infectious diseases.

Never dry hands on an apron or your clothes. They may contain bacteria that could be transferred to the food.

If possible, use tongs, forks or any other appropriate utensils, instead of your hands.

Always use a clean spoon when you want to sample food. Don't use your fingers!

Wear clean, protective clothing every day, and wear an apron where appropriate.

Keep pets and animals away from food, and away from any area where food is being prepared.

Frequently asked questions

What about gloves?

Wearing latex gloves is not a substitute for hand washing. Disposable gloves should be treated no differently to unprotected hands.

Even if you're wearing gloves, you still have to be aware of food contamination. You should wash your hands before putting gloves on, to prevent any bacteria on your hands passing through the porous surface of the glove.

What protective clothes do I have to wear?

If you handle food, you should wear light-coloured protective clothing, such as an apron or protective outer smock. Hats are a good form of protective clothing to prevent hair from touching food. Hair should be clean and tied back (where appropriate).

What if I have a wound or I'm wearing a band-aid?

Any minor cuts, abrasions or sores are an ideal breeding ground for bacteria. They must be covered with waterproof dressings and you should wear a disposable glove as well. Wash your hands before putting on the glove. First aid equipment should be available on the food premises.

What about jewellery?

Rings, bracelets or any other jewellery should not be worn, as they may carry bacteria that could be transferred onto food.

Is smoking allowed?

No. It's illegal to smoke in the preparation area of a food premises or near food. If you smoke away from the food premises you must wash your hands before recommencing work or handling any food.